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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

11 APR 1978

Office of Legislative Counsel

OLC 78-1351/a

Mr. Edward J. Palmer, Staff Director
Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs
Committee on International Relations
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Palmer:

This is in response to your letter of 27 March 1978, requesting comments on a letter from Lt. Col. Albert D. Shinkle, USAF (RET.), to the Honorable Lester Wolff, Chairman, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, dated 21 February 1978.

We consider it highly improbable that a Laotian officer had the capability or did, in fact, hold thirty to sixty American POW's during the period 1974-1975. Perhaps such a feat was possible, but it is not reflected in any intelligence reports and, on the face of it, is improbable. Maintaining that large a group, in captivity, would have required a logistical effort which most likely would have become known to U.S. officials.

Several other persons have made claims of access to Pathet Lao officials similar to that of Col. Shinkle's, but there is simply no hard evidence to support the contention that there are Americans still alive in captivity in Laos. Americans were captured in Laos about whom the Laotian Communist government now claims to have no information.

As you know, the House of Representatives has addressed the problem posed by Col. Shinkle and we cooperated fully in that endeavor. The final report of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia concluded in December 1976 that the "chief reason the Department of State was unable to gain an accounting was the reluctance and intransigence of the Indochinese Communist leaders." (Page 132, Final Report.) The Presidential Commission, led by the then President of the United Auto Workers of America, Mr. Leonard Woodcock, met various Laotian (and other

Indochina) officials during March 1977 and concluded that "there is no evidence to indicate that any American POW's from the Indochina conflict remain alive."

The above conclusions are still relevant. We believe it is probable that the Indochinese Communist governments have additional information on the fate of American POW's and MIA's but have chosen not to provide that information. There must be Indochinese Communist cadre with access to information on the subject. Obtaining access to those individuals, however, is unlikely. Convincing them it is in their interest to provide accurate information is even less likely. For the present, obtaining additional information on American POW's and MIA's in Indochina appears, as the House Select Committee concluded, to depend on the good will of the Indochinese leaders and people - or on events which cannot be foreseen.

In addition, you may be interested to know that this Agency is supporting the Department of Defense in responding to more than 100 next-of-kin inquiries for release of all reporting on POW's and MIA's in Indochina. It is estimated that some 10,000 pages of material will be included in the release. You should know that all of that information has been evaluated in connection with the conclusions arrived at in this report.

If we can be of further assistance in this or any other matter, please let me know.

Sincerely,

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[Redacted]
Acting Legislative Counsel

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